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Denison in the hunt to become an "Iowa Great Places" pilot

by Gordon Wolf

Denison is one of 74 "places" in Iowa competing to become one of three pilot projects under a new program launched by the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with 18 state agencies.

Along with the honor of being selected, the "prize" would be the channeling of resources from the participating state agencies.

The Iowa Great Places Initiative was developed to focus on what is unique and authentic about places in Iowa, to leverage many different programs, and to focus on multiple dimensions in a place, said Monica Fischer, deputy director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs.

She stated Governor Tom Vilsack issued an executive order directing state agencies to direct resources to the pilot "places." Some agencies are looking at a set-aside of funds. Other agencies may award preference points for grant applications. It is up to each agency how to participate in the pilot project, said Fischer.

Invitations to participate in the Iowa Great Places Initiative were issued this spring by the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs.

Fischer said there were 146 "places" that originally responded with invitations.

Of the 146, 74 remain, Fischer stated. The other 72 have either decided to collaborate with another place or have decided they were not ready and are waiting to compete in future years of the Iowa Great Places Initiative.

The places weren't defined by the geographical boundaries of a city or county. Some of the "places" include regions and neighborhoods, said Fischer.

According to the Department of Cultural Affairs Web site, some of the invitations came from regions as big as the 10-county Great River Road along the Mississippi and the length of the Loess Hills from Plymouth to Fremont counties. Some invitations came from small sections of cities such as the Floyd Boulevard market area in Sioux City.

Fischer said that many of the ideas that have been submitted are combining ideas and are connecting places in a comprehensive approach.

Denison's presentation

Denison Mayor Ken Livingston said the plan very closely conforms to Denison 2020 plan.

He stated that Denison being selected as one of the Iowa Great Places pilot projects would allow the community to accelerate the implementation of the 2020 plan beyond the community's own capabilities.

Between September 14 and September 27 the 74 "places," including Denison, will make their presentations to a team of Citizens Advisory Board members for the Iowa Great Places Initiative. The 12-member Citizens Advisory Board has been divided into teams of three or four board members to hear the presentations. On October 3 the entire board will meet to select the three pilot "places."

Denison's presentation will be on Wednesday, September 21, beginning at 4 p.m. in the Donna Reed Theatre. People are encouraged to attend, said City Manager Al Roder.

"The entire presentation is based on the history of partnering together and the entrepreneurial spirit of Denison," said Roder.

He added, "This initiative is about the people. We want people to be there to show their support but we also want them there to see what makes Denison a great place. Too often we live too close that we don't realize what we have."

Coaches

Fischer said a big part of the program has been the coaching process.

"Approximately 75 people, mostly from state agencies,

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were trained to be Great Places coaches. They have gone out to the communities to flesh out their proposals," she explained. "From July 1 to now most places have had a coaching visit."

Fischer said it is the intent to continue the Iowa Great Place Initiative beyond this year.

"From the three pilot places that are selected, we're hoping

to demonstrate the ability to leverage resources and move these local visions forward," she stated.

Fischer said the Department of Cultural Affairs would be going back to the Iowa Legislature this year for more funding for the program. The legislature already appropriated \$100,000 in Fiscal Year 2005 and \$200,000 for Fiscal Year 2006 administrative costs.

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